

ARMY CHIEF BACKS THE SOLDIERS

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In the counter-insurgency, where operations are short, swift, based on hard-intelligence and usually conducted at company level and below, junior leaders, with their innovative skills and quick-decision making ability, hold the key to victory over militants and their supporters. Though, leaders are said to be borne with leadership qualities but analyses of famous leaders have shown that all leaders have certain common leadership traits, which can be developed through training and practice. That's why Indian Army trains its officers to become successful leaders. Further, there is a proven concept called Leader - Group - Situation i.e., with a group of men under command, a leader will perform differently in different set of situations.

On 9 April 2017, the day of Lok Sabha bypoll in Srinagar, a young major from 53 RR Battalion received an emergency call from a polling booth. On arrival, he saw the polling staff comprising 12 officials was surrounded by almost 1200 people. He urged the crowd to disperse but they did not budge, rather they started pelting stones and even a petrol bomb was thrown on them. With the Army's basic principles of "Aid to Civil Authority" in the back of his mind, using his ingenuity he took a bold decision. He identified a stone peltor, purportedly to be the ring leader, got hold of him before he could escape and tied him to his jeep. Despite the hostile action from stone-pelting crowd, he did not fire even a single bullet but by using his ingenuity and innovative mind, he overpowered a ring-leader to dissuade his stone pelting companions to freeze their violent actions. He accomplished his task with aplomb by saving so many lives. By next morning, Major Nitin Leetul Gogoi was hailed as a hero by the media. As expected, within a couple of days, there appeared a tweet in social media by a former Chief Minister of J & K followed by a short video clip of the Kashmiri youth, Farooq Ahmed Dar, tied to the jeep and being paraded through one particular village. The splendid work of Major Gogoi was tarnished by the counter-narrative, where Mr Dar was projected as innocent bystander, picked up by a callous young officer to be used as a human shield, thereby infringing upon his fundamental rights as enshrined in our constitution as also hurting his dignity.

Though the Army had instituted a Court of Inquiry to bring out the facts of the incident but the award of Army Chief's Commendation Card to Major Gogoi for his "sustained efforts in Counter Insurgency operations" created a furore in the media. Although Israeli Defence Forces have been

using the “human-shield” concept against stone-pelters in their West Bank since almost a decade but Indian Army has never adopted this as a strategy. Captain Amrinder Singh, the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Punjab has aptly brought out (The Indian Express, 20 May 2017) “Major Gogoionly did what was absolutely correct, and possibly the only sane and logical course of action available to him, in the circumstances.his remarkable presence of mind and timely action that probably saved the lives of many of his men, for whom he was responsible as their officer-in-charge.” Irrespective of the unwanted criticism, the decision taken by Major Gogoi was in ‘good faith’ and his action should have been unequivocally supported by his immediate superiors. Further, the Army Chief’s Commendation Card was not for any gallantry but in recognition of Major Gogoi’s work done over a period of time. For one particular incident for which he has not been proven guilty and matter may be considered sub judice as the Court of Inquiry is still in progress, can you derecognise the good work done by him earlier and deny him an appreciation which he rightfully deserved.

General Bipin Rawat stated that Indian Army was facing a “Dirty War” in J & K, which had to be fought through innovative ways. He said “Proxy war is a dirty war. It is played in a dirty way. The rules of engagement are there when the adversary comes face-to-face and fights with you.....I wish these people, instead of throwing stones at us, were firing weapons at us. Then I would have been happy. Then I could do what I (want to do.)” [Financial Express 28 May 2017]. He has been much criticised by the opposition parties regarding this as a political statement. The militants, dressed in combat fatigues and equipped with deadly weapons, through their photographs in social media, create an impression upon a common man as if they are very brave and daring fighters. On the contrary, they are cowards who operate incognito mostly in the hours of darkness with their weapons concealed. They seek shelter with local inhabitants through coercion and cajolement. During day time, they merge with the locals and cannot be singled out. So when your enemy is invisible but he can strike at you with impunity, task of armed forces become even more difficult. Further, they are proxy of Pakistan hence it is termed as Proxy War. Army Chief has simply called it a ‘Dirty War’ for the ease of understanding of common citizens of India, who are not aware of the ground situation. It is a dirty war because you are fighting against an invisible enemy, who can appear from anywhere, placing you at a disadvantage in engaging him.

Kashmir problem is the fall out of a bad political decision taken at some point of time in the history. To avenge his defeat of 1971, our disgruntled neighbour adopted a doctrine of “Bleeding India through Thousand cuts”. Subsequent to his failed experiment in Punjab, it sowed the seeds

of militancy in Kashmir Valley by continuously infiltrating foreign militants as also providing support to home-grown militants and their political masters, the Hurriyat. The corrupt state governments in succession never allowed the development funds to reach the common men, alienating them further from the mainstream. Who is the legitimate authority to resolve it? Obviously the Government of India, which has been elected with a popular mandate and not the fractured political parties in opposition, who want to talk to Separatists i.e., the Hurriyat, which provide funds to stone-pelters, misguide the youth and provoke the local populace. Who knows the ground reality in Kashmir : it is either the people who live over there or the security forces who are familiar with every inch of the terrain. The Army Chief had stated that it was only South Kashmir with its four districts, which had been affected by militants. But passions are being inflamed by vested parties, inimical to national interests, by stating that the whole of Kashmir is on the boil. If the Army Chief speaks the language of the government and the government in power supports him, he is just implementing the government's political decision. Renowned German Strategist Carl von Clausewitz wrote "War is nothing but a continuation of politics by other means." Here politics is not the role played by political parties but the 'Political End-State' what the Government wants to achieve as a national objective.

In conventional warfare, after gaining an initial foothold in enemy territory, forces have to be rushed in vigorously till it becomes an expanding torrent and we overwhelm the enemy to achieve a resounding victory over him. Similarly in counter-insurgency operations, once we achieve moral ascendancy over the militants, relentless pressure has to be maintained by the security forces to neutralise majority of them with their support bases and bring back the common men into the fold of elected government. General Bipin Rawat's astute leadership has not only raised the morale of our troops but also demoralised the militants and their supporters. Results being achieved in the subsequent days are indicative of the above. Let the tempo not die down. Further, we must establish cyber dominance in the region to remain ahead of the militants to counter their mobilisation techniques and technologically upgrade ourselves to engage the militants from a stand-off distance to cause maximum casualties to them without exposing our troops to avoidable danger. The most important aspect, which the central government must ensure is that no Kashmiri youth be left unemployed, lest they fall prey to the nefarious designs of Pakistan / Hurriyat or even certain selfish political parties. Leakage of funds and corruption must be curbed ruthlessly.

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